

## On Location: Charleston, South Carolina

by Photographer Raymond Klass

For those of us in the northeast, it is always a pleasure to see the first signs of spring after a long, cold winter season. This year, some good friends from down south suggested that I make the trip to Charleston to photograph spring flowers. I jumped at the opportunity to bask in the near 80 degree sunny weather and photograph the beautiful gardens and historic architecture of the area.



Charleston is a city that dates back to the revolutionary war, and its remaining cobblestone streets and dutifully preserved buildings are true icons of an earlier time. Residents of these estates, along with the strong historic preservation groups of the area have made sure that not only these places are available for visitors to see, but that they are decorated in a tasteful and really quite photogenic way. Small but thoughtfully designed private gardens juxtapose the architecture, creating a visual palette rich in creative opportunities.



On several occasions, we left our tripods and big camera bags behind in the car, just taking a lens or perhaps two and ventured out into the street to photograph the sights of the historic French Quarter. Today's digital cameras have made capturing these impromptu images much easier than ever before. With the ability to change my ISO dynamically, I find that I am able to get sharp images with the depth-of-field I want in almost any situation. This type of photography varies greatly from the more rigid tripod type shooting I normally partake in. It was quite a pleasure to leave these pieces behind and spend some time just shooting off-the-cuff.

For this city shooting, I chose to take my new lens, Nikon's 24-70 mm F/2.8. It worked well, even with the extra focal length added by my cropped frame digital camera. I found that this lens covered the majority of the scenes I photographed. I also carried a 12-24mm F/4 lens with me for situations that required a wider perspective. I only used the wider lens for a couple of shots, and I'm not sure it was



really necessary – a moderate telephoto is all you really need for shooting around the city. The streets in the historic district are quite narrow, and a longer telephoto, like a 70-200 or 70-300 isn't really necessary. Just make sure to bring plenty of extra memory cards, as you'll surely see and photograph more than you expected.

In addition to historic Charleston, there are several worthwhile gardens to visit during your trip down south. We visited both Magnolia Plantations and Middleton Place, to photograph the Azaleas in bloom. Both gardens feature beautiful plantings and a relaxed atmosphere that allows photographers to bring and use tripods. Middleton and Magnolia are accommodating the needs of photographers.

For both Middleton and Magnolia, you'll definitely want to take a macro lens and a wide-angle lens. There are some great landscapes with the beautiful bridges and walks of Magnolia, and the giant reflecting ponds of Middleton. Both gardens feature a wide range of possibilities, so you'll likely want to take your entire bag along





with you. A bag with wheels works well, as the paths will accommodate even the small, hard luggage wheels that many camera bag manufacturers use. In addition to your lenses, you'll want to take a diffuser, reflector, and a flash or flashlight to provide some fill light if you have a sunny day.

Magnolia Gardens is also home to the Audobon Swamp Garden. It requires a separate admission, but is well worth it if you have an interest in photographing wading birds. The swamp garden features a well-designed and implemented boardwalk that makes for easy access to these nesting birds. For the swamp, you'll likely want a longer telephoto lens – at least 300mm, to make the most out of the wildlife opportunities. I would also take a shorter telephoto, as there are some nice wide angle and moderate landscape opportunities.

There are several good options for places to stay in the area. For the utmost in convenience, Middleton Place offers rooms right in the heart of the garden. The advantage of staying here is that you have exclusive access to the grounds for both sunrise and sunset. During my trip, I stayed at the Holiday Inn Express just outside of Charleston in nearby Summerville. I found it to be in a convenient location – with plenty of dining options, at a more moderate price than the hotels or restaurants located in the heart of downtown Charleston, which tend to be on the expensive side.

In addition to the photographic opportunities in the Charleston area, if you're driving from the North, you'll likely pass by South of the Border – just across the North Carolina, South Carolina border. It's a great place for a quick shoot, and a nice rest from driving. For more information about the unique opportunities there, check out my April 2010 newsletter.

Charleston is great location with an almost endless array of photographic possibilities. It offers different opportunities for photographers with different interests – from its beautiful historic French Quarter, to the glowing flowers of Middleton and Magnolia Plantations. Early April is a great time to celebrate the coming of spring with a trip to one of the nicest places to photograph this colorful season.

